

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 ARAE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04
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P R 091444Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3204
INFO AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PARAMARIBO 0185

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, NS
SUBJ: SOEMITA HANGS ON

REF : PARAMARIBO 0167 AND 0152

SUMMARY: ONE WEEK AFTER MINISTER PRESIDENT ARRON REPORTEDLY ADVISED AGRICULTURE MINISTER SOEMITA TO RESIGN IN THE FACE OF CORRUPTION AGAINST HIM, SOEMITA REMAINS IN OFFICE. INDICATIONS ARE THAT SOEMITA DOES NOT WISH TO RESIGN VOLUNTARILY AND ARRON MAY SHIFT DEBATE TO PARLIAMENT TO AVOID RUPTURE IN CABINET WHICH MIGHT RESULT FROM DECISION TO FIRE SOEMITA. AS UNCERTAINTY DRAGS ON, POSSIBILITY OF SOEMITA AFFAIR AFFECTING NPK COMBINATION'S ABILITY TO GOVERN AND RE-ELECTION EFFORT INCREASES ALTHOUGH POSSIBILITY REMAINS THAT SOEMITA COULD ACCEPT HIS FATE AND WITHDRAW FROM OFFICE TO AWAIT PARLIAMENT'S JUDGMENT AS TO WHETHER HE SHOULD BE PROSECUTED.

1. MARCH 9 PRESS REPORTS MARCH 8 MEETING OF NPK PARTY COUNCIL WITH ARRON TO DISCUSS IMPLICATIONS OF SOEMITA AFFAIR. ARRON IS SAID TO HAVE TOLD MEETING THAT SOEMITA IS NOT PREPARED TO RESIGN AS MINISTER VOLUNTARILY AND THAT MATTER MAY BE SHIFTED
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TO PARLIAMENT TO DECIDE WHETHER SOEMITA SHOULD BE PROSECUTED. SHOULD THIS PRESENT PROBLEMS, ARRON IS REPORTED TO BE PREPARED TO DISSOLVE PARLIAMENT AND CALL ELECTIONS FOR AS EARLY AS JULY.

2. SOEMITA HAS BEEN QUOTED AS SAYING HE WAS INCLINED TO RESIGN LAST FRIDAY (MARCH 4) AFTER RECEIVING ARRON'S ADVICE ON PROSECUTION'S DETAILED CORRUPTION CASE AGAINST HIM. BUT ACCORDING

TO PRESS REPORTS AND HIS OWN ACCOUNT AS GIVEN IN AN INTERVIEW WITH DE WARE TIJD, A MAJOR DUTCH-LANGUAGE DAILY, SOEMITA WAS STRONGLY URGED TO STAY ON BY LEADERSHIP OF HIS PARTY, THE KTPI. REMAINDER OF SURINAM'S POLITICAL LEADERS NOW SEEM TO BE PREOCCUPIED ATTEMPTING TO CALCULATE POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF SOEMITA'S RESIGNING OR BEING FORCED OUT OF CABINET AND CASE BEING DEBATED IN PARLIAMENT. UNTIL SOEMITA MAKES DEFINITIVE DECISION ON HIS COURSE OF ACTION, OTHERS ARE LIKELY TO KEEP THEIR OPTIONS OPEN UNTIL REPERCUSSIONS ON NPK'S CONTINUED ABILITY TO GOVERN AND CHANCES FOR RE-ELECTION BECOME CLEARER.

3. MAJOR QUESTION FOR ARRON AND NPK IS THREAT TO COMBINATION'S SLIM PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY IF SOEMITA IS FORCED OUT AS MINISTER OR HIS CASE IS DEBATED IN PARLIAMENT. EITHER COURSE OF ACTION COULD CAUSE SOEMITA TO TAKE KTPI INTO OPPOSITION CAMP. ALTHOUGH ARRON MIGHT SUCCEED IN GETTING PARLIAMENT'S AGREEMENT TO PROSECUTE SOEMITA (AND EVEN THIS IS NOT CERTAIN), LOSS OF KTPI SUPPORT WOULD REDUCE NPK TO 18 SEATS IN 39-MEMBER PARLIAMENT AND GIVE OPPOSITION VHP OPPORTUNITY TO PUT TOGETHER MAJORITY BLOC OF 20 WITHOUT FORMER VHP-ER AND HPP REPRESENTATIVE GEORGE HINDORIE, OR 21 WITH HIM. IF SUCH AN EVENTUALITY APPEARS LIKELY, ARRON WOULD PROBABLY HAVE PARLIAMENT DISSOLVED, FORCING ELECTIONS EARLIER THAN HAD BEEN PLANNED.

4. VHP LEADER JAGGERNATH LACHMON, HOWEVER, MUST TREAD A CAUTIOUS PATH SO AS NOT TO BE SEEN AS UNDERMINING GOVERNMENT STABILITY FOR THE SAKE OF POLITICAL GAIN. IN FACT, PARLIAMENT CHAIRMAN WIJNTUIN, WHO RECENTLY MET WITH LACHMON AND NPS FRACTION LEADER NOOITMEER, HAS TOLD AMBASSADOR LACHMON ASSURED HIM HE WOULD VOTE CONFIDENTIAL

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TO "UPHOLD THE CONSTITUTION," IF MATTER COMES UP IN PARLIAMENT AS A FORM OF IMPEACHMENT PROCEEDINGS. IN ADDITION, VHP'S JAVANESE ALLIES IN FORTHCOMING ELECTION (PENDAWA LIMA) WOULD FIND IT DIFFICULT TO WORK WITH KTPI SINCE THEY WERE AMONG SOEMITA'S FIRST AND LOUDEST ACCUSERS.

5. PNR LEADER AND MINISTER OF ECONOMIC AFFAIRS BRUMA SEEMS TO PREFER TO STAY OUT OF WHOLE CONTROVERSY, POSSIBLY BECAUSE HE SEES POTENTIAL DEFECTION OF KTPI FROM NPK COMBINATION AS SERIOUS THREAT TO NPK'S SURVIVAL AND HIS OWN CONTINUED ACCESS TO POWER. BRUMA REFUSED TO ATTEND CABINET MEETINGS LAST WEEK INTENDED TO DISCUSS QUESTION (ALLEGEDLY ON GROUNDS OF ILLNESS, BUT EMBASSY DOUBTS THIS), AND STRESSED TO AMBASSADOR THAT SOEMITA, LIKE ANYONE ELSE, IS ENTITLED TO HIS RIGHTS AND PROTECTION OF THE LAW, POINTING OUT THAT CONSTITUTION PROVIDES FOR ESTABLISHING CRIMINAL LIABILITY OF A MINISTER THROUGH LEGISLATION WHICH HAS NOT YET BEEN PASSED.

6. IF SOEMITA CONTINUES TO HANG ON TO HIS PORTFOLIO, AS HE

APPEARS TO BE DOING, ARRON SEEMS TO HAVE THREE OPTIONS, ALTHOUGH ONE--LETTING MATTER DROP--APPEARS UNTENABLE AT THIS STAGE. OTHER COURSES OF ACTION OPEN TO HIM ARE OUTRIGHT DISMISSAL OF SOEMITA OR FIRST ASKING PARLIAMENT TO DECIDE WHETHER SOEMITA SHOULD BE PROSECUTED. EITHER POSSIBILITY OPENS PROSPECT THAT ARRON WILL BE MANEUVERED INTO CALLING ELECTIONS SOONER THAN PLANNED. THIS, HOWEVER, MIGHT NOT BE THOUGHT ALL BAD WHEN CONSIDERED OVER THE LONGER TERM AS HE WOULD HAVE BEEN TRUE TO HIS PUBLICITY EXPRESSED DESIRE FOR "CLEAN GOVERNMENT." ON THE OTHER HAND, ANY DECISION WHICH ALLOWS SOEMITA TO REMAIN IN OFFICE MIGHT ASSURE CONTINUE SUPPORT FROM A SUBSTANTIAL SEGMENT OF THE JAVANESE COMMUNITY AND CONTINUED PARLIAMENTARY CONTROL FOR THE

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FM AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3205
INFO AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 PARAMARIBO 0185

TIME BEING, BUT COULD ULTIMATELY JEOPARDIZE ARRON'S CHANCES OF RETURNING TO OFFICE AFTER ELECTIONS ARE FINALLY HELD BECAUSE HE HAD FAILED TO TAKE FIRM ACTION.

7. IF REMAINS CONCEIVABLE THAT SOEMITA WILL END MUCH OF THE DEBATE BY RESIGNING AS MINISTER AND DECIDING NOT TO RESUME HIS SEAT IN PARLIAMENT. ACCORDING TO PARLIAMENT CHAIRMAN WIJNTUIN, H WOULD HAVE TWO WEEKS IN WHICH TO MAKE KNOWN HIS DESIRE TO TAKE HIS SEAT BY WRITING TO WIJNTUIN. THIS COURSE OF ACTION WOULD STILL NECESSITATE PARLIAMENT DECLARING SOEMITA SUBJECT TO PROSECUTION IF GOS DECIDED TO PROCEED AGAINST HIM, BUT HE MAY CONCLUDE THAT HE COULD AROUSE SUFFICIENT SYMPATHY TO PREVENT THIS OR THAT HE HAS A STRONG DEFENSE AND ULTIMATELY COULD RESCUE HIS POLITICAL CAREER BY WINNING AN ACQUITTAL.

8. WHATEVER THE OUTCOME OF THE SOEMITA AFFAIR, IT HAS MADE THE
UPCOMING ELECTIONS, WHENEVER THEY ARE HELD, A WIDE-OPEN AFFAIR
RAISING THE POSSIBILITY OF NEW COALITIONS AND EVEN NEW LEADER-
SHIP FOR SURINAM. HOW ARRON AND THE OTHER POLITICAL LEADERS
REACT OVER THE NEXT FEW WEEKS WILL HAVE IMPORTANT EFFECTS ON THE
ELECTORAL ALLIANCES AND STRATEGIES THAT WILL EMERGE. HENCE, THE
FLUID FACTORS WHICH EXISTED IN THE ELECTORAL COMPUTATIONS EVEN
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BEFORE SOEMITA'S PROBLEMS BECOME EVEN MORE IMPORTANT AND WE
WILL HAVE TO AWAIT A SETTling OF THE POLITICAL WATERS BEFORE
GETTING A BETTER VIEW OF LIKELY ELECTION OUTCOME.
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